Meeting Summary
Panther Recovery Team Meeting
Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa, FL
December 18-19, 2001

Panther recovery team members present:

Jimmy Bullock, International Paper Company
Dana Bryan, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Nikki Castleberry, Quality Deer Management Association
Joe Clark, U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division
Ron Clark for John Donahue, National Park Service
Donald Cuozzo, National Home Builders Association
Pete David, South Florida Water Management District
Monika Dey for Skip Bergmann, US Army Corps of Engineers
David Dorman, U.S. Forest Service
Tom Jones, Barron Collier Partnership
John Kasbohm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Robert Lacy, Chicago Zoological Society
Gary Lester, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Laurie Macdonald, Defenders of Wildlife
Dave Maehr, University of Kentucky
Roy McBride Livestock Protection Company
Brian Millsap, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Jeff Norment, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Jim Ozier, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
Andrew Schock, National Wildlife Federation
David Thompson, White Oak Conservation Center
Steve Williams, Florida Panther Society
Jora Young, The Nature Conservancy

Fish and Wildlife Service participants:

Dawn Jennings, Vero Beach Field Office
Jim Krakowski, Florida Panther NWR

Other participants and observers:

Chris Belden, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Josh Bruen, University of Kentucky
Karen Hill, Florida Panther Society

Deborah Jansen, Big Cypress National Preserve
Randy Kautz, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Darrell Land, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Amy Nolan, Teacher
Mike Orlando, University of Kentucky
Nancy Payton, Florida Wildlife Federation
Craig Pittman, St. Petersburg Times

Panther recovery team members not present:

Dennis Hardin, Florida Division of Forestry
Bob McCollum, Alabama Division of Game and Fish
Buddy Baker, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Dwight LeBlanc, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
Frank Mazzotti, University of Florida
Stephen O'Brien, National Cancer Institute
Richard Rummel, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Mel Sunquist, University of Florida/Florida Panther Technical Advisory Council

Others invited but not attending:

American Farm Bureau Federation
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Florida Farm Bureau Federation
Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida
Seminole Tribe of Florida

The goals of this meeting were:

1. To agree on a mechanism to conduct a critical review of available panther data and previous data analyses.

2. To determine the most effective means to achieve public involvement in the revision of the panther recovery plan.

3. To review the recovery goals and criteria of other listed species.

4. To elaborate on the identified threats to the panther under listing Factors A-E and rank these threats to determine actions necessary to achieve reclassification and delisting.

5. To organize into appropriate subteams

6. To identify the information requirements that team members need in order to develop recovery actions.

The meeting began at 8:30am and the following items were discussed:

First Recovery Team Meeting Summary:

The recovery team endorsed the meeting summary (attached) as correct and representative of the discussion at the first meeting on July 25-26, 2001.

Project Updates:

Dawn Jennings gave an update on the progress being made to develop a landscape conservation strategy for the panther in south Florida by the panther subteam of the Service's Multi-species/Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT). A draft suitable for peer review is anticipated by February 1, 2002. Copies of the draft will be distributed to the recovery team at that time.

Darrell Land gave a brief update on the Genetic Restoration project. Darrell and Dr. Stephen O'Brien met recently and discussed the ongoing genetic analyses being conducted. Over 200 samples have been collected as part of the study. Work on pedigrees continues. Findings on phase one of the study are expected this year.

Options for Public Involvement during the Recovery Plan Revision:

At the last recovery team meeting in July 2001, the Service agreed to develop prior to this meeting, options for obtaining public involvement during the process to revise the recovery plan. John Kasbohm presented the following four options to the team for consideration.

1. Advertized recovery team meetings that are open to the public
2. Informal workshops for the general public
3. Official public meetings
4. Focus group meetings with affected constituent groups with participants that are invited by the recovery team

John indicated his preference to use option 4 for the following reasons:

- Option 1 could create a poor work environment at recovery team meetings by bringing more people to an already large team and lengthening meetings in order to provide time for public comments.

- Option 2 may be too general to provide useful input, there is no clear idea of where and how many workshops would be needed, and this option may be more appropriate after a draft plan is released for comment.

- Option 3 is an unnecessarily formal process at this early stage of the recovery plan. revision. Option 3 may be an appropriate format if needed after the draft plan is released for comment.

- Option 4 allows issues and concerns to be addressed with specific targeted stakeholders. Invited participants could help determine when general public workshops might be needed.

The team presented no objection to using option 4 as long as focus groups were conducted in both south Florida and in the remainder of the historic range. Potential focus groups could include for example, landowners in south Florida, and corporate timber companies/managers in potential reintroduction areas. Subcommittees from the Reintroduction and South Florida subteams need to be developed to identify appropriate target groups and to initiate focus group meetings. The best time to conduct focus groups would be following results of this meetings to identify and rank critical threats and before the development of actions and recovery criteria. ***Action item***: ***John Kasbohm will coordinate with the subteams to develop subcommittees to plan focus groups meetings.***

Data review scope of work:

John Kasbohm handed out a proposed scope of work (attached) for the review of existing panther data and analyses. Brian Millsap explained that he had provided the Wildlife Society a copy of the scope of work to see if they were interested in developing the review team and conducting the review. No changes to the document were suggested by the team. The recovery plan revision will continue in parallel with the review instead of waiting until the review is completed. However, the intent is to complete the review as soon as possible. Potential funding for the project from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission needs to be spent by December 31, 2002. The Service also has budgeted funding for this project. (Up date: in January following the recovery team meeting, the Wildlife Society subsequently contacted Brian and declined to participate in the review. The Society for Conservation Biology also did not express an interest in the project. However, John and Brian contacted the Hornocker Wildlife Institute, and Howard Quigley has agreed to lead the review team and is preparing a more detailed scope of work. He has invited Dr. Paul Beier, Northern Arizona University; Dr. Mike Vaughan, USGS, BRD–Virginia Tech; and Mike Conroy, USGS BRD–University of Georgia also to participate. A meeting to kick off the review likely will be held in May or June.)

Recovery goals and criteria:

John Kasbohm provided a summary (attached) of the recovery goals and criteria for several other listed

species to the team. In general, recovery criteria have several components including population size, a time frame under which population status is acceptable, habitat quantity and quality, and management agreements. These components are focused on the threats to the species and are derived to allow the Service to measure and document when a species has reached its recovery goals of delisting or reclassification from endangered to threatened.

At the first recovery team meeting, the following draft panther recovery goals were identified:

Reclassification: one population of at least 250 panthers
Delisting: two populations of at least 250 panthers each

A panther population can exist as a single unit, or can be made up of a collection of populations, each with a minimum of 50 panthers, with gene flow among them

Several issues need to be addressed to develop acceptable goals and criteria:

1. These draft goals need to be considerably expanded to include criteria that address threats specific to the panther and also document how they will be measured.
2. Population size requirements need to be revisited and the assumptions used to come to that population size explained in the plan. Explaining the underlying assumptions holds for other criteria as well.
3. Recovery criteria need to based on the best science and removing the threats that require the panther to be listed.
4. An explanation of changes to criteria in the revised plan versus the previous plan need to be presented. For example, the change in the number of populations from 3 to 2.

The team agreed that it is important to emphasize that the current goals should not be misinterpreted to mean that 50 panthers is the minimum number needed in a population for long-term security. The minimum under this draft is 250, but the population can be made up of units of 50 if and only if the subunits have documented and regular gene flow among them, sufficient to provide for the genetic stability of the population. For example, because the existing panther population in south Florida does not connect to other population units, even though it may contain greater than 50 animals, it does not meet these draft criteria. It would not meet the criteria until such time that either the population level had increased or other connected subunits were established.

Team organization and subteam assignments:

John Kasbohm handed out suggested assignments for the Reintroduction and South Florida subteams (attached). The team agreed that these subteams were an appropriate way to organize the recovery team. No one voiced an objection to the proposed team assignments.

Process and goals for breakout sessions to develop critical threats:

Jora Young gave a presentation outlining the process to be used to identify and rank threats to the panther. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The team then broke into south Florida and Reintroduction subteams to conduct the threat analysis for each area separately. The following is a summary of the process used to analyze and rank threats to the panther.

1. Customize the threat list developed at the first meeting for each of the 5 listing/recovery factors A-E.

2. Define threats based on the following definition - a threat is a combination of a stress to the panther and the source of that stress. Stresses cause destruction, degradation or impairment to the species; damage may be current, ongoing or potential; and damage may be either via direct impact (animal will be killed) or indirect impact via impairment of population structure or habitat degradation.

3. Identify stresses and rank. Stresses were ranked based on severity of damage and scope of damage.

   Severity of damage is the level of damage expected because of the stress within the foreseeable future. The following ranks were used for severity of damage:

   Very High - likely to destroy or eliminate the species from some part of its range
   High - likely to seriously degrade the species over some portion of its range
   Medium - likely to moderately degrade the species over some portion its of range
   Low - likely to only slightly impair the species over some part of its range

   Scope of damage is the degree of pervasiveness over the species' range. The following ranks were used for scope of damage:

   Very High - likely to be pervasive, affecting the species throughout its range
   High - likely to be widespread, affecting the species in many portions of its range
   Medium - likely to be localized, affecting the species over some part of its range
   Low - likely to be very localized, affecting the species over a limited portion of its range

4. Identify sources and rank each. Sources were ranked based on degree of contribution to the stress and the reversibility of the source.

Contribution was ranked as follows:

Very High - a very large contributor of the stress
High - a large contributor of the stress
Medium - a moderate contributor of the stress
Low - a low contributor of the stress

Irreversibility was ranked as follows:

Very High - the source produces a stress that is not reversible
High - the source produces a stress that is reversible, but not practically affordable
Medium - the source produces a stress that is reversible with a reasonable commitment of additional resources
Low - the source produces a stress that is easily reversible at a relatively low cost

5. The ranks for both stresses and sources were then combined to identify the overall threat ranks for each factor; the factor overall threat rank was at least the highest rank given to any threat associated with a particular source of stress. If there were multiple threats related to the same source of stress, the factor overall threat rank was adjusted upwards by using the "3-5-7" rule as follows:

   Three High rankings equal a very high
   Five Medium rankings equal a high
   Seven Low rankings equal a medium

The attached table summarizes the threat ranking results. Throughout the table, V = Very high, H = High, M = Medium, L = Low.

The next step in the process is for each subteam to develop tasks to address each of the critical threats identified under the listing factors. Subteam meetings will be scheduled following the focus group meetings.